

Let's Be Friends

Written by Edwin Radin

Illustrated by Clair Fink



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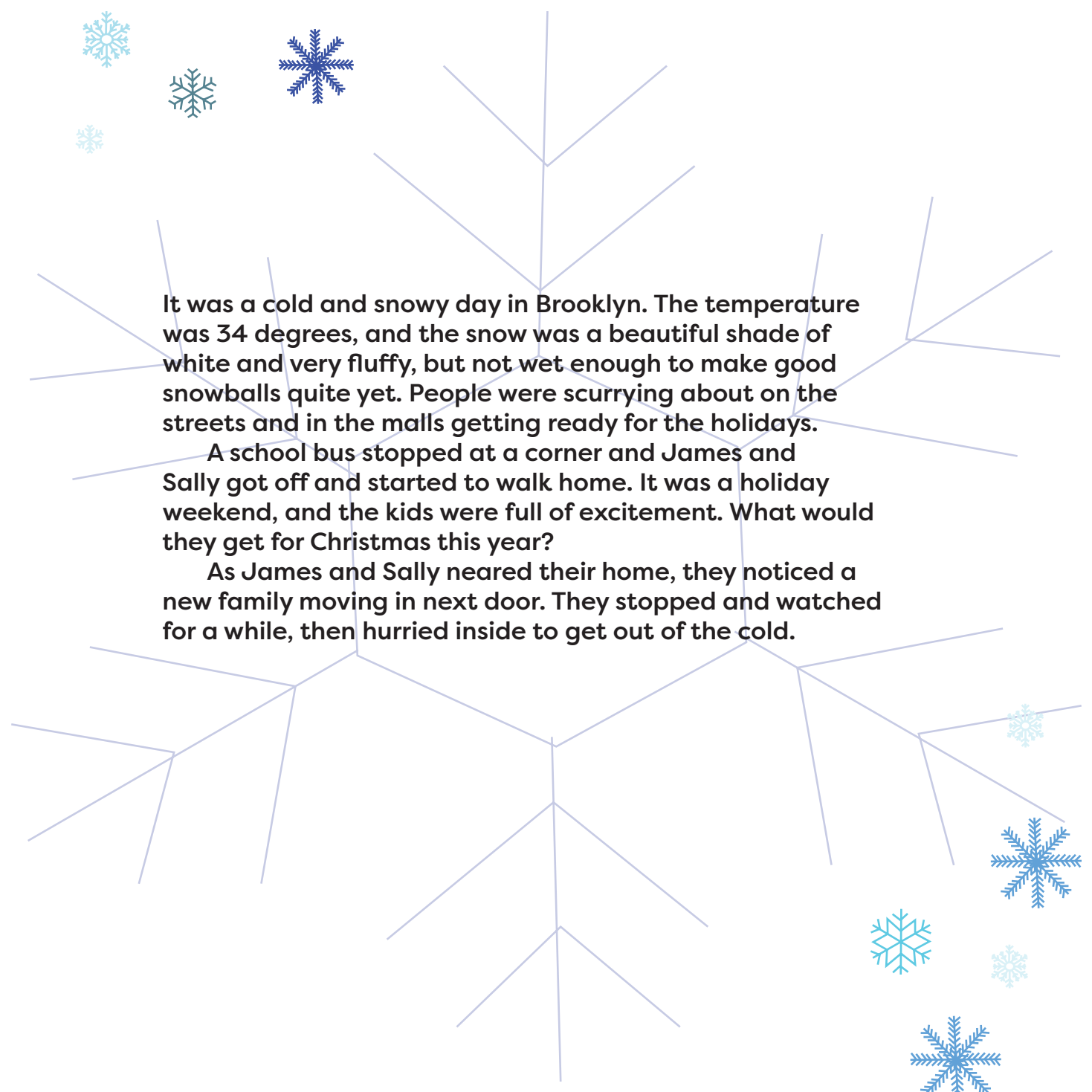
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*This book is dedicated to my grandchildren, Rilynn, Jaxtyn,
and Margot. They are my inspiration for this book and I love
them dearly. Enjoy!*



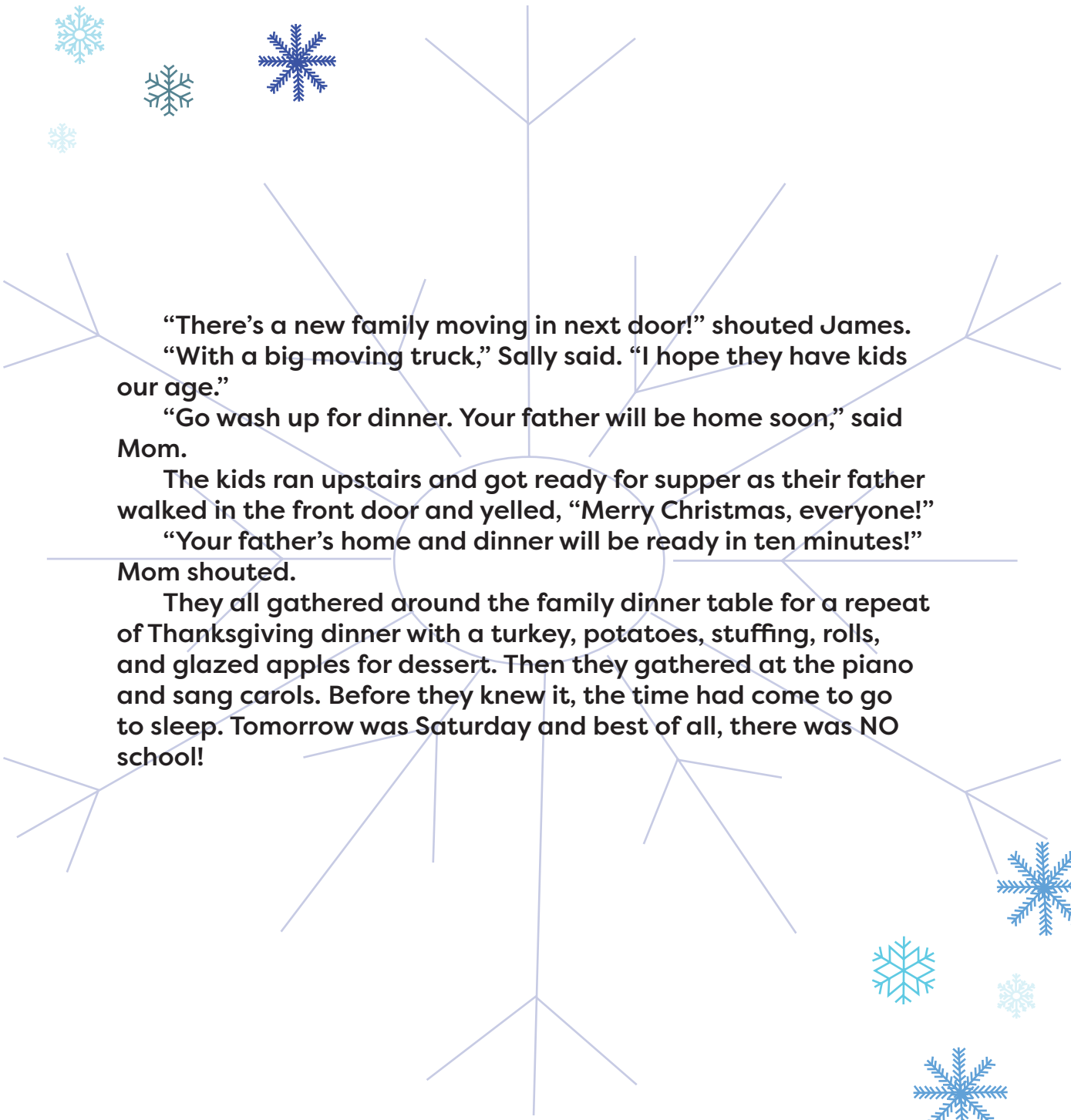
It was a cold and snowy day in Brooklyn. The temperature was 34 degrees, and the snow was a beautiful shade of white and very fluffy, but not wet enough to make good snowballs quite yet. People were scurrying about on the streets and in the malls getting ready for the holidays.

A school bus stopped at a corner and James and Sally got off and started to walk home. It was a holiday weekend, and the kids were full of excitement. What would they get for Christmas this year?

As James and Sally neared their home, they noticed a new family moving in next door. They stopped and watched for a while, then hurried inside to get out of the cold.







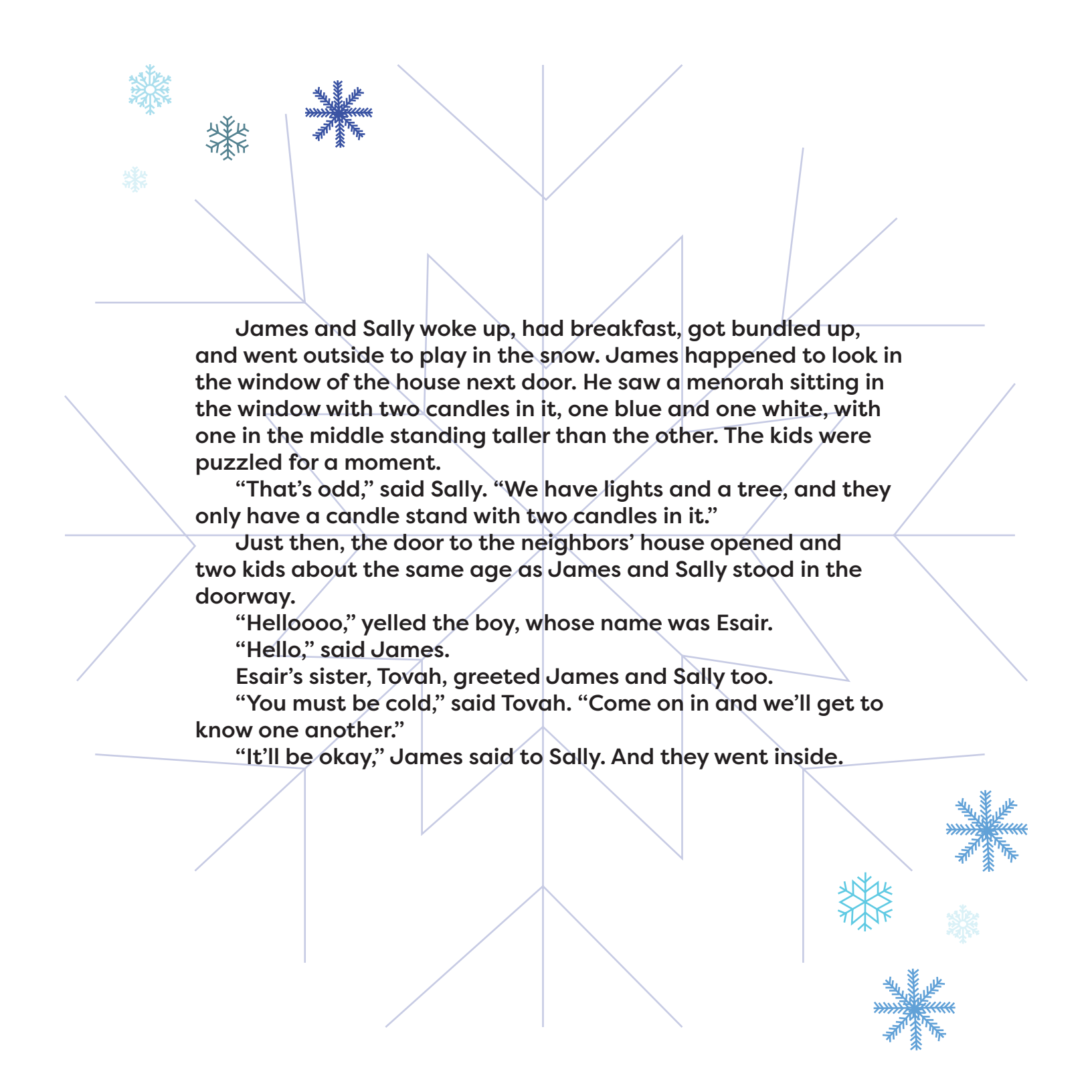
“There’s a new family moving in next door!” shouted James.
“With a big moving truck,” Sally said. “I hope they have kids
our age.”

“Go wash up for dinner. Your father will be home soon,” said
Mom.

The kids ran upstairs and got ready for supper as their father
walked in the front door and yelled, “Merry Christmas, everyone!”

“Your father’s home and dinner will be ready in ten minutes!”
Mom shouted.

They all gathered around the family dinner table for a repeat
of Thanksgiving dinner with a turkey, potatoes, stuffing, rolls,
and glazed apples for dessert. Then they gathered at the piano
and sang carols. Before they knew it, the time had come to go
to sleep. Tomorrow was Saturday and best of all, there was NO
school!



James and Sally woke up, had breakfast, got bundled up, and went outside to play in the snow. James happened to look in the window of the house next door. He saw a menorah sitting in the window with two candles in it, one blue and one white, with one in the middle standing taller than the other. The kids were puzzled for a moment.

“That’s odd,” said Sally. “We have lights and a tree, and they only have a candle stand with two candles in it.”

Just then, the door to the neighbors’ house opened and two kids about the same age as James and Sally stood in the doorway.

“Helloooo,” yelled the boy, whose name was Esair.

“Hello,” said James.

Esair’s sister, Tovah, greeted James and Sally too.

“You must be cold,” said Tovah. “Come on in and we’ll get to know one another.”

“It’ll be okay,” James said to Sally. And they went inside.







"This is a nice home," said James. "I don't see a Christmas tree though."
"That's because we don't celebrate Christmas," said Esair. "We're Jewish, so we celebrate Hanukkah. It's also known as the Festival of Lights."

"But I don't see lights or trees in your home," said James as he looked around with a puzzled look.

"That's because our lights are the candles on our menorah," Tovah explained. "A menorah holds nine candles. The Shamas in the middle you always light first. Then, with the Shamas, you say a blessing and light the other candles from left to right. Each night we add a candle until all of the other eight candles are lit. One for each night."

"Why are there eight nights?" asked Sally.

"Because, Sally, when the Maccabee warriors were fighting the Syrians in biblical times, the warriors took cover in a cave for protection. Judah Maccabee, their leader, noticed they only had one drop of oil in their lantern. He sighed and said, 'We only have one drop of oil. It won't last very long.' Judah lit the lantern, and to everyone's surprise, the oil burned for eight straight days and nights. This was a miracle!"

"Wow, that is cool," said James.

Just then, Tovah's mother brought out hot chocolate, potato latkes, and fried jelly doughnuts for everyone.

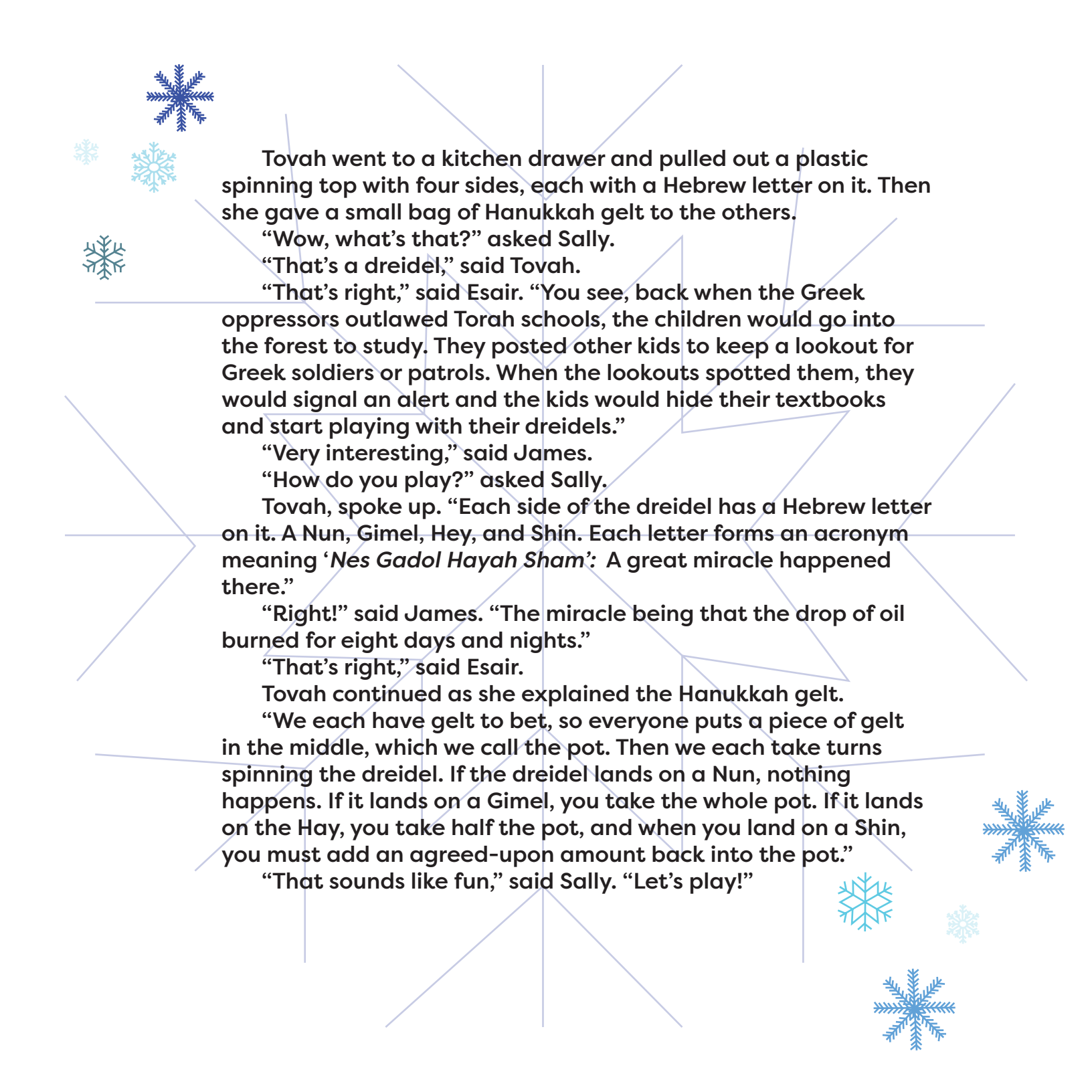
"This looks great," said James. "All of a sudden I am so hungry!"

"Try your latke with applesauce," said Esair. "It tastes even better."

"Why do you eat latkes and jelly doughnuts at Hanukkah?" asked Sally.

"Because," Esair spoke up, "since Hanukkah is an oil-based miracle, we eat fried foods to celebrate and remember the miracle."





Tovah went to a kitchen drawer and pulled out a plastic spinning top with four sides, each with a Hebrew letter on it. Then she gave a small bag of Hanukkah gelt to the others.

“Wow, what’s that?” asked Sally.

“That’s a dreidel,” said Tovah.

“That’s right,” said Esair. “You see, back when the Greek oppressors outlawed Torah schools, the children would go into the forest to study. They posted other kids to keep a lookout for Greek soldiers or patrols. When the lookouts spotted them, they would signal an alert and the kids would hide their textbooks and start playing with their dreidels.”

“Very interesting,” said James.

“How do you play?” asked Sally.

Tovah spoke up. “Each side of the dreidel has a Hebrew letter on it. A Nun, Gimel, Hey, and Shin. Each letter forms an acronym meaning ‘*Nes Gadol Hayah Sham*’: A great miracle happened there.”

“Right!” said James. “The miracle being that the drop of oil burned for eight days and nights.”

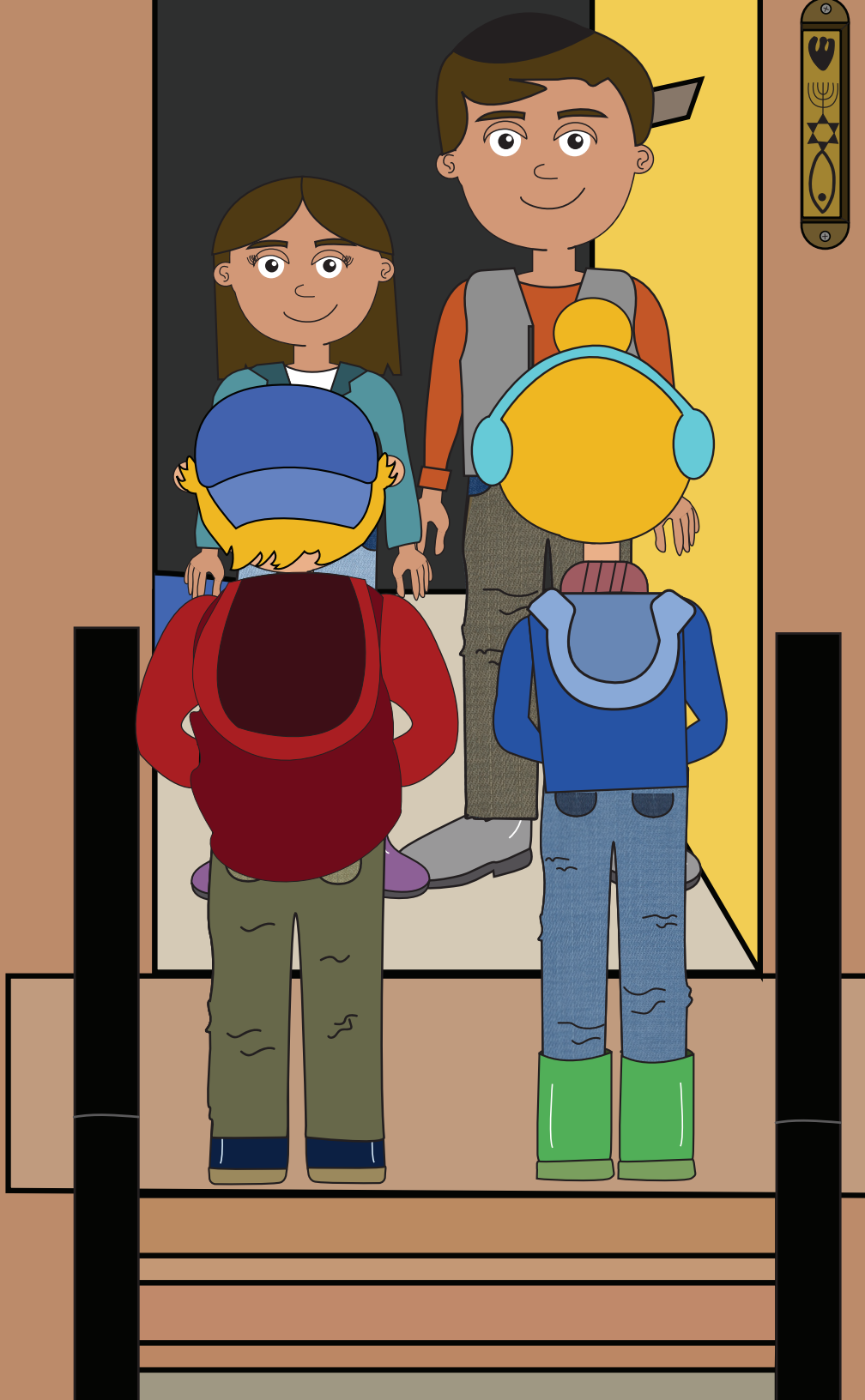
“That’s right,” said Esair.





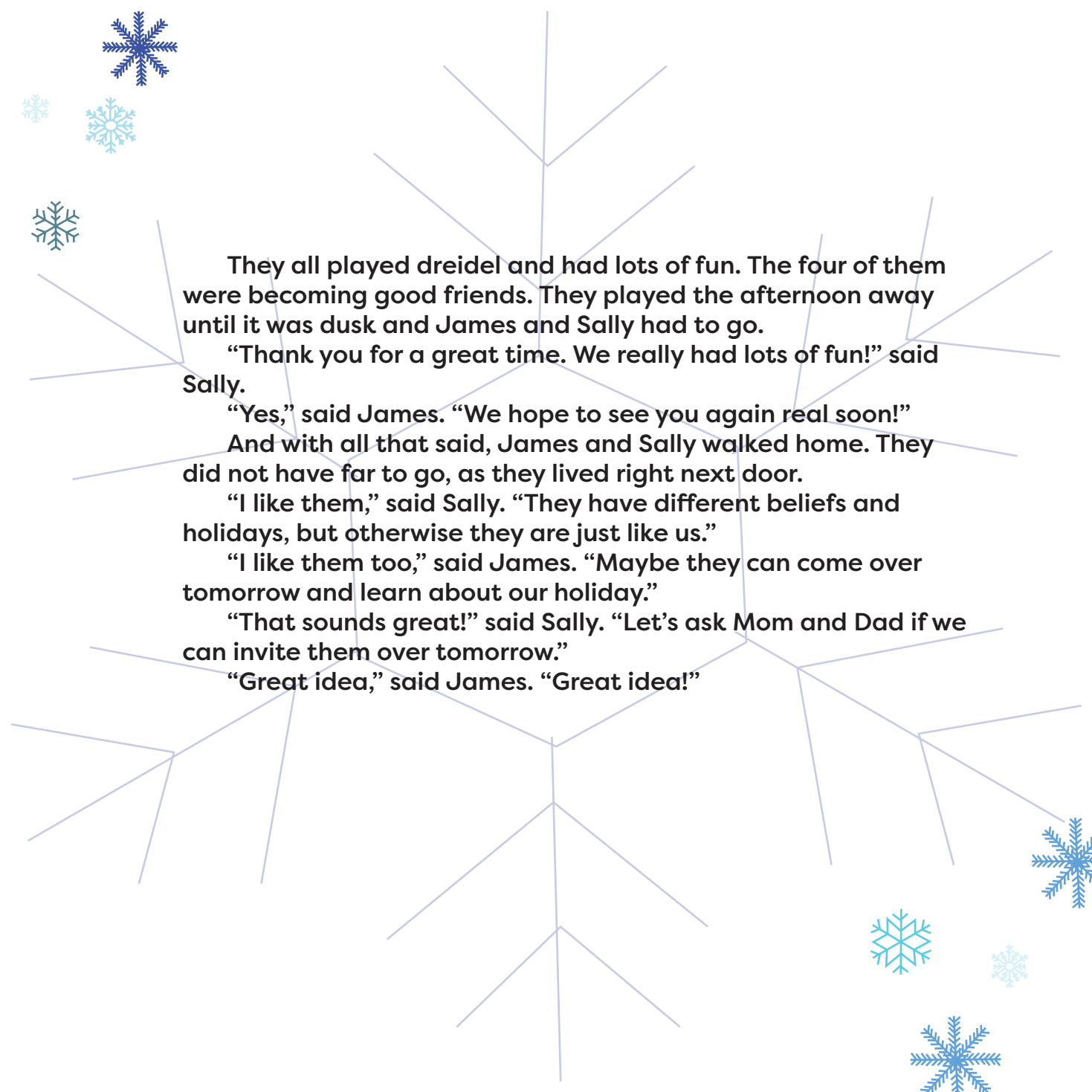
Tovah continued as she explained the Hanukkah gelt.

“We each have gelt to bet, so everyone puts a piece of gelt in the middle, which we call the pot. Then we each take turns spinning the dreidel. If the dreidel lands on a Nun, nothing happens. If it lands on a Gimel, you take the whole pot. If it lands on the Hay, you take half the pot, and when you land on a Shin, you must add an agreed-upon amount back into the pot.”

“That sounds like fun,” said Sally. “Let’s play!”







They all played dreidel and had lots of fun. The four of them were becoming good friends. They played the afternoon away until it was dusk and James and Sally had to go.

“Thank you for a great time. We really had lots of fun!” said Sally.

“Yes,” said James. “We hope to see you again real soon!”

And with all that said, James and Sally walked home. They did not have far to go, as they lived right next door.

“I like them,” said Sally. “They have different beliefs and holidays, but otherwise they are just like us.”

“I like them too,” said James. “Maybe they can come over tomorrow and learn about our holiday.”

“That sounds great!” said Sally. “Let’s ask Mom and Dad if we can invite them over tomorrow.”

“Great idea,” said James. “Great idea!”





The next morning, James, with his mother's permission, went next door to invite Esair and Tovah over to their house to celebrate Christmas. The kids were thrilled.

"We'd love to," said Tovah.

"Can't wait," said Esair.

"Great," said James. "Come over in about an hour."

"Okay, we will," said Esair, and he closed the door behind him to keep out the cold.

Esair kept watching the clock as time seemed to go slower than ever. All of a sudden, Tovah pushed her brother and he almost fell out of his chair.

"Hey, careful," said Esair. "Why did you push me like that?"

"It was the only way to get your attention. It's time to go to Sally's house."

They both put on their winter coats and ran out the door over to the neighbors' house.

James welcomed them in, took their coats, and walked them into the family room. There was a huge tree covered with sparkling lights and ornaments. There were even red-and-white candy canes. There were also cookies all sparkled up with icing and glitter, and four cups of hot chocolate.

"These are delicious cookies," said Tovah, as Esair grabbed another one.

"Delish!" said Esair with his mouth full.

For the next two hours, the kids ate and played games.

It was getting late, and Esair and Tovah gathered up their coats.

"Wow, we had a great time! Thank you for having us," said Esair.

"Yes, thank you very much for having us," Tovah said. "This was lots of fun!"

"You're welcome, children," said the mother. "It was a pleasure having you over here. Come back real soon."

"We will," said Esair.

Tovah yelled out, "We'll see you in school Monday!"

"Ahh, don't remind me," said James as he started to laugh.

Esair and Tovah went home, walked in the front door, took their coats off, and fell asleep in front of the warm, crackling fireplace in their family room.









The next morning, the kids walked to their bus stop. James saw Esair and Tovah standing on the corner with large platters in their hands. Each one was piled high with Hannukah treats, cookies, and a couple of dreidels. The platters were covered in plastic wrap to keep the treats fresh.

“Hi, Esair, hi, Tovah,” James and Sally called out.

“Good morning,” shouted Esair.

“What are you carrying on those large plates?” asked Sally.

“Lots of treats and cookies,” said Tovah. “Esair and I are going to explain Hannukah to our classes, play dreidel, and enjoy our mom’s homemade treats.”

“Wow!” said James, full of excitement. “I’m so glad you’re in my class.”

“Me too,” laughed Sally.



The school bus came. James and Sally, along with Esair and Tovah, boarded the bus, found their seats, and enjoyed their ride to school.

Even though their new friends had different beliefs and different holidays, Esair and Tovah and James and Sally knew they were best friends. And best of all, they lived right next door to each other and would see each other often!

In fact, in years to come, the four would always celebrate both holidays together, because they learned that friendship is possible in all walks of life.



Other books by Edwin Radin

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About the Author

Edwin Radin is an author from Columbus, Ohio. He writes stories for children, teens, and young adults that embrace Judaism and the themes therein. A follower of the Jewish faith himself, finding ways to convey the importance of feeling included and accepted is a major reason for his writing (but he also writes for his granddaughter, of course!).

Visit www.edwinradin.com to connect with Edwin and learn more about his books.